

Forest School

Forest School Guidance

Welcome to Forest School and thank you for joining us. With your support we can provide these exciting opportunities for our children. Forest School is about giving children:

Time to ...

- explore and experiment at their own pace,
- become engrossed in their own activities,
- observe and learn about the natural world,
- extend on classroom-learning.

Opportunities to ...

- problem solve,
- take risks within a safe environment,
- make mistakes and learn from them,
- develop resilience, perseverance and empathy,
- take control of their own learning,

Space to ...

- work through their own thoughts and ideas independently,
- work together on small or large common goals and projects,
- learn and apply social skills such as conflict resolution, negotiation, diplomacy and compromise,
- be physically active for an extended time.

... and, of course, it's also all about having fun together, being creative and using our imagination! There are no targets or goals, timescales or tests, but we have a plan, developed collaboratively with the children. Children are free to navigate in their own way through the session, and to get involved in optional outdoor craft, cooking, site maintenance, fire-lighting, woodwork, habitat building or otherwise.

"Forest School is an inspirational process that offers ALL learners regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence and self-esteem through hands-on learning in a woodland or natural environment with trees."

See the [Forest School Association](#) website for further inspiration!

A few practicalities:

1. Clothing: We go outdoors, whatever the weather - which means that children (and adults) should be appropriately dressed for the weather on the day. You may be asked to help children with getting ready, they should do this as independently as possible, including putting their coats, wellies, wet clothes, etc. away at the beginning/end of sessions.

2. Group Identity: We encourage each group to feel as if they are the guardians of our Forest School Areas, by establishing 3 basic rules, as shown on our Wood Cookies: "We look after ourselves, each other and the environment around us."

3. Behaviour and relationships: Children and adults are expected to treat each other with respect and school rules apply. Adults encourage children to deal with disputes as they arise and support children to express their needs and choices appropriately, referring to the 3 basic rules and the School Behaviour Policy. Withdrawal from Forest School should not be used as a sanction for unwanted behaviour that may have occurred during the school week.

4. Safety: At the beginning of each session, in the Briefing, we go over any safety issues relevant to the weather, site conditions, e.g. slippery surfaces, poisonous berries, the day's activities, e.g. tool hazards, pond safety, etc. Children know the boundaries of **The Copse** and **The New Forest** and only go outside them with an adult, or if they have asked to go to the toilet. We have a small first aid kit for minor cuts and bumps.

We encourage children to be as independent as possible, to take time to think for themselves rather than following adult instructions and to learn by trial and error, by their mistakes and by the consequences of their actions. If you can see that an activity is going to cause serious harm or injury, please intervene, otherwise, minor slips and trips are all part of learning to think ahead and look after yourself! Useful phrases for pre-empting disaster might be ...

- Can you think of a safer way of doing this?
- Is everyone in your group happy with the rules of this game?
- Do you think that rope/twig is strong enough for you to ...?
- How could your friend help you with that log bridge?
- Equally, such questions are useful for us to encourage (rather than teach) children to predict, explore and experiment in all kinds of situations in Forest School.
- I wonder how we could make it stronger/ bigger/ lighter/more colourful ... etc.
- I wonder what would happen if ...

5. Observation and support: Our sessions are child-centred and the adult role is to observe the children and support their play and learning. If you are an enthusiastic role model for having fun outdoors in nature, so will the children be. You may be asked to support a particular activity, den building, cooking, or a game! Take part when invited by children and remember to play on their terms without redirecting their play to your agenda. Try parallel playing new activities and skills near children. It's a great opportunity to enjoy being a big kid again!

6. Clearing Up: At the end of sessions, following a brief plenary, and possibly 'Sticky Elbows' the children are asked to tidy up and put things back carefully as they found them, e.g. logs, equipment, etc. Some children do find this time particularly challenging so inviting a child to help you in a job, or giving some direction is the best thing.

7. Have fun - Forest School is for big kids too!

"We look after ourselves, each other and the environment around us."